

Genesis 3:8-24

Consequences

Introduction

In the beginning of Genesis 3, the serpent deceives the woman who is persuaded to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and gives the fruit to her husband to eat. In this act of rebellion against the rule of God, their eyes are opened, their innocence lost, and they now know guilt and shame. However, those are not the only consequences. In Chapter 2:8-9, God places the man in a paradise where all is provided for him. By the end of chapter 3, he is now driven out to a life of toil and hardship.

Divine Inquest¹ – Vs. 8-13

As we pick up the story following the events from last week, in vs. 8, the man and woman hear the LORD God *walking in the garden in the cool of the day*. Literally, “cool” refers to the breezes which would have picked up in the afternoon. The term for “walking” is also used of the LORD “walking” among His people as His presence manifested itself in the tent sanctuary (cf. Lev. 26:12, Deut. 23:15[14], 2 Sam. 7:6-7). His presence was apparently not continuous in the garden, but not unexpected either. What is changed is that the man and his wife now hide themselves. The same phrase “the man and his wife” is also used in 2:25 in contrast to this moment, “*the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*” Eating of the fruit has now introduced them to guilt and shame and the fear of facing the holy God.

In Vs. 9 the LORD God calls out for the man, “*Where are you?*” He is clearly looking for the man. The question could be considered rhetorical as the LORD knew where they were and what had happened and is using this to call them out even as in 4:9 when the LORD asks Cain where his brother is already knowing the answer. The man answers in vs. 10, avoiding the main issue, and instead focuses on why he was hiding. However, in doing so, he only gives himself away, for he acknowledges a significant change in his reaction to God. There is now fear and shame and the need to cover himself. Here again it appears that the problem with nakedness is not sexual in nature, but reflects a feeling of shame and vulnerability in contrast to 2:25 above. And so God asks the next pointed questions in vs. 11 even as a detective² who knows the guilty party in advance but uses a line of questioning to draw out a confession. “*Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?*”

So now the man knows the jig is up, and in vs. 12 he owns up to the transgression, but he tries to excuse himself at the same time. “*The woman whom you gave to be with me...*” Even in this first act of disobedience, we see something typical of human reaction to accusation and personal guilt. He tries to lessen his own guilt by putting the blame on his closest companion and even implies that God, Himself is at fault for providing the woman. God does not respond to Adam’s excuses, but in vs. 13 turns to the woman. His question is more of a shocked exclamation than a real question as it is already known what she has done. The woman, in her turn, also tries to justify herself. She, however, only blames the serpent (not the man or God) claiming she was deceived.

Verdict and Consequences – Vs. 14-19

In vs. 14, the serpent is not given a chance to explain himself, but God immediately pronounces a curse upon him. In vs. 1, he was called the most crafty of all the beasts. Now, because of what he has

¹ Term from Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15, Word Biblical Commentary*, 1987, p. 76

² Again term taken from Wenham, *Ibid.* p. 77

done, he is the most cursed, and it is a curse of humiliation as he is forced to crawl on his belly and “eat dust”. Not that dust is his diet, but his position will cause dust to fill his mouth. In vs. 15, there is a further consequence of enmity between the woman and the serpent as well as between their descendants. The verbs “crush” and “strike” (from the NIV) are actually the same in the Hebrew. The ESV and NASB use “bruise” in both cases. The difference is in location – head vs. heel. While striking the head might appear to be an advantage, the poisonous nature of the snake means its strike can be equally deadly. The verbs are also imperfect iterative, meaning that this will be a repeating battle. This (and the other pronouncements) are in poetic, rhythmic form, and so there is likely a symbolic nature to this curse and battle so that it does not simply represent a natural human aversion to snakes (with all due respect to Indiana Jones). Using the serpent as representative of evil powers, this then represents the ongoing battle between humans and all representatives of evil. While there is no clear indication of victory of the “seed” of the woman, Wenham notes that “this is a curse on the serpent, not on mankind, and something less than a draw would be expected. ... likely that the curse envisages a long struggle between good and evil, with mankind eventually triumphing”³

In vs. 16, the LORD God addresses the woman. Note that neither she nor the man is actually cursed, but only the serpent and later the land is cursed. And while the consequences of their actions result in hardship, it is in relation to the original blessing that is still operating – that of being fruitful and multiplying. Having a large number of children was considered to be a blessing from God, but now for the woman, it would come with increased toil and pain. The first two lines refer to the increased pain in “childbirth” (in Hebrew, this actually the word for conception) and in bringing forth children so that the pain is present throughout the entire process not just in the final labor. Walton suggests that the “pain” is more than physical but that now with the threat of death there is also the anxiety and worry associated with pregnancy and motherhood⁴. As for the last two lines, there is quite a bit of controversy and disagreement on the significance of “desire” and “rule”. The desire could be the instinctual drive to bear children, but that cannot be fulfilled without cooperation from the husband and thus he has dominance. If it is assumed that the man has already been granted authority over the woman as she was taken from him to be his helper and he named her, then the “desire” and “rule” terms seem to have already been present before the fall. But this could be descriptive of how this relationship can now become abusive so that “love” and “cherish” become “desire” and “dominance”. One final option (based on the use of “desire” in Gen. 4:7) is that this is the woman’s desire to be independent of her husband.

Finally, God addresses the man who is still held responsible for his actions despite his excuses. His transgression was to listen to the voice of his wife (i.e. obeyed her) rather than to obey God. The word for “eaten” is used 5 times in this pronouncement – because he has eaten, in toil and pain he shall eat. Now, the land will be cursed. To “curse” is the opposite of to “bless”. To bless puts the object under the favor and protection of God whereas to be cursed is to be removed from God’s favor. In contrast to 2:9 in the garden where “*God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food*”, it will now “*bring forth thorns and thistles*” requiring work to cultivate and grow the food they need, and thus *by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread*. Note that work itself is not the punishment as work was also assigned in the garden. But the pain and frustration associated with the work will increase even as it has for the woman in childbirth. The pronouncement ends in vs. 19 with another reference to the land/ground as an inclusio to vs. 17. The man was taken from the ground and to the ground he will return for he was formed from dust and to dust he would return.

Expelled – Vs. 20-24

In vs. 20-21, the story now returns to prose with a couple of practical matters. Previously, Adam declared the “classification” of the woman, but here he gives her an individual name of “Eve” which

³ Ibid. p. 80

⁴ John H. Walton, *Genesis, The NIV Application Commentary*, 2001, p. 227

means “life” or “living” as she would be the mother of all the living. The fig leaves that Adam and Eve had sown for themselves would have been skimpy at best and hardly practical. They were the garments of desperation. However, even in the midst of this judgment, God continues to provide for them. He brings them proper tunics of animal skins that would cover and protect them even as they are now expelled from the garden.

In vs. 22-24, Adam and Eve are sent out from the garden. In vs. 22, God acknowledges that the serpent’s promise was partially true that even though he did not become like God himself, the man was now like one of the heavenly beings knowing good and evil. However, this now meant that he would need to be prevented from eating from the tree of life and living forever. God’s sentence is only partial (a rarity in the Bible) as if to indicate the speed with which he is now dispatched from the garden. In fact they are “driven out” – the same word used when the Canaanites were to be driven out of the Promised Land. God then puts cherubim in place to guard the entrance. This final picture reinforces the notion that the Garden of Eden was an archetype of the tabernacle and temple which were decorated with images of cherubim guarding the dwelling place of God. The ultimate punishment then is not only pain and toil and physical death, but there is a spiritual death in that they have been driven out from the presence of God.